

AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

**AIR FORCE MILITARY TUITION ASSISTANCE:**

**A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS**

by

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A Research Report Submitted to the Faculty

In Partial Fulfillment of the Graduation Requirements

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15 February 2012

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## **Biography**

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## **Abstract**

Historically, the purpose and intent of Air Force (AF) military tuition assistance (Mil TA), has reflected the environmental context and has adjusted to meet AF needs accordingly. Congressional interest combined with the current environment of prolonged conflict and economic crisis requires a re-evaluation and subsequent update to AF Mil TA policy. A historical examination of AF Mil TA intent and policy within their wartime, economic, and cultural contexts demonstrated that Mil TA has most often been tied to AF requirements; however, this emphasis has decreased over time with recruiting, retention, and Airmen freedom of choice becoming prominent. In addition, program costs have risen exponentially, not only with increasing tuition rates, but also with changes in legislation. Lastly, the GI Bill has also focused on recruiting and retention, thereby providing duplicate efforts between the Services and the Veterans Administration. Recommendations to reduce tuition assistance reimbursement percentages and return to requirements driven Mil TA program may help control costs, while ensuring quality education for Airmen all while meeting more AF requirements.

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## Introduction

The Air Force Voluntary Education Program (AFVEP) is one of many programs supporting Air Force (AF) Force Development. It provides off-duty educational opportunities and services that enhance an Airman's professional and personal development. The program also supports recruiting and retention efforts.<sup>1</sup> Military Tuition Assistance (Mil TA), part of the AFVEP, provides Airmen with monetary assistance for civilian academic courses taken off-duty. In FY10, the AF spent \$184.6 million in TA, supporting 23,501 associate, 4,112 baccalaureate, and 1,476 graduate degree completions.<sup>2</sup>

Recently, the Department of Defense's (DoD) Mil TA program has been under congressional inquiry. Congressional hearings have scrutinized both the DoD's high spending and the quality of education Service members are receiving, specifically from for-profit institutions.<sup>3,4</sup> As a result, the DoD has looked at ways to reduce costs while ensuring quality education is provided to Service members. Reducing costs is challenging given that tuition has increased one and half to two times greater than the rate of inflation. In 2002, the average cost of an undergraduate course was \$276.79; the cost of a graduate course was \$461.70. In 2011, the same courses cost \$600.40 and \$750.00 respectively, a 54% and 38% increase.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Air Force Instruction (AFI) 36-2306, *Voluntary Education Program*, August 13, 2010, 5.

<sup>2</sup> Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES), "DoD Voluntary Education Fact Sheet, FY2010," DANTES, <http://www.dantes.doded.mil> (accessed February 11, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs, *Preventing Abuse of the Military's Tuition Assistance Program*, 114th Cong., 1st sess., 2011.

<sup>4</sup> House Committee on Armed Services, *A Question of Quality and Value: Department of Defense Oversight of Tuition Assistance Used For Distance Learning and For-Profit Colleges*, 111th Cong., 2nd sess., 2010, 1-2.

<sup>5</sup> Donna Miles. "Officials Seek DoD-wide Tuition Assistance Plan," Department of Defense, <http://www.defense.gov/News/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=65726> (accessed February 8, 2011).

The concerns over Mil TA regarding budget, quality, and program intent are not new and have posed challenges for AF leaders throughout history. In response, the AF Mil TA purpose and policy has adjusted accordingly. The current context of Congressional interest combined with the nation's prolonged conflict and economic crisis again requires a re-evaluation and update to AF Mil TA policy. This paper provides a historical examination of AF Mil TA intent and policy across the contexts of war and peace as well as economic cycles and social upheaval. Drawing from this history, this paper recommends changes in Mil TA policy given the current challenges. The paper does not provide recommendations on the GI Bill educational benefits; however, a comparative analysis of the corresponding GI Bill benefits is warranted as benefits have expanded since the implementation of this World War II (WWII) initiative. This expansion of benefits has created redundancies with Mil TA. As such, any recommended changes in Mil TA should consider duplicative VA benefits.

## **Literature Review**

Formal military education and training prepares Service members for specific military tasks. Off-duty, non-military education provides members with opportunities to obtain higher education comparable to their civilian counterparts. This education not only prepares members for transition back to the civilian sector, it also enhances them both professionally and personally while on active duty—benefiting both the member and the Service. This literature review first provides a historical review of non-military education (also referred to as voluntary education and/or Mil TA throughout the paper) policy and intent while simultaneously providing respective GI Bill information. Secondly, the review discusses AF Mil TA's role in recruiting and retention efforts.

## 1838 through World War II

### *Nonmilitary Education*

Prior to the Civil War, the only legislation providing education opportunities for enlisted members was an 1838 statue allowing Army posts to hire a chaplain to act as a schoolmaster; the program's primary purpose was spiritual uplift. During the Civil War, educational programs aimed to improve literacy among black enlistees. It wasn't until the Army Reorganization Bill of 1866 that the foundation for a formal education program was established. This legislation established Army post schools with the intent to instill patriotism, provide cultural opportunities, and reduce crime by eliminating idleness. Although Army leadership supported the program, it struggled over the next decade—lacking awareness, sufficient facilities, and soldier attendance. As a result service-run schools ceased in 1898.<sup>6,7</sup>

During WWI, Army leadership once again emphasized educational programs. This time, the purpose was requirements drive. The Army needed better-educated enlisted personnel to master the technical skills required in the modern Army. As a result, the Army established a Student Army Training Corp, utilizing civilian institutions to train members for specialized duties. This program allowed members to be relieved from active duty to attend college for three years. The curriculum included engineering courses and resulted in commission upon completion. Unfortunately, the program was abruptly cancelled due to financial constraints following the armistice. After WWI, albeit fiscally constrained, Army officials continued supporting educational programs because at the time 25% of inductees were illiterate.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Bruce White, "ABC's for the American Enlisted Man: The Army Post School System, 1866-1898," *History of Education Quarterly* (Winter 1968): 479-480.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 487-488.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Willis Easterling, Jr., "Nonmilitary Education in the United States Air Force, with Emphasis on the Period of 1945-1979" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1979), 21-24.

World War II sparked renewed interest in education programs. The Army made extensive use of civilian universities and established the Armed Forces Institute to provide soldiers with correspondence courses. The program's intent was to better qualify personnel for military duty, prepare members for increased responsibilities, improve morale, and prepare personnel for eventual transition back to civilian life.<sup>9</sup>

#### ***Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944***

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (GI Bill of Rights) was intensely debated, but has since been recognized as one of Congress' most important acts. The bill's primary purpose was to prevent serious post WWII unemployment problems, diminish unrest and dissatisfaction among veterans, and reestablish the human resources stunted by the war. Eligible veterans were entitled to one year of full-time training plus a period equal to their time in service, up to 48 months. Benefits included \$500 a year for tuition, books, fees, and other training costs. In addition, members received a subsistence allowance.<sup>10</sup>

#### **1945-1949: A Separate AF**

##### ***Nonmilitary Education:***

Educational experiences from WWII convinced military leaders that education was a critical adjunct to military life. In addition, after WWII the military and the nation were making great strides in science and technology. Military and political leaders, keenly aware of these developments, advocated programs that enabled members to keep pace with these advances.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 34-35.

<sup>10</sup> Military.com, "GI Bill Turns 62 Today," <http://www.military.com/NewsContent/0,13319,102383,00.html> (accessed February 8, 2012).

Lastly, the end of WWII marked the Cold War's beginning and the public supported programs they saw as contributing to national defense.<sup>11</sup>

Although the AF became a separate Service in 1947, the AF education programs operated under Army direction until 1949.<sup>12</sup> Army Regulation 85-40-1 provided guidance regarding funds for members participating in off-duty education. Beginning in 1948, members were reimbursed 75% of tuition costs, not to exceed \$25 per three-semester hour course.<sup>13</sup> Air Force Letter (AFL) 34-52 provided the first official AF education program guidance. The AF mission combined with the increased environmental complexity imposed a burden on the career officer, demanding higher levels of performance.<sup>14</sup> A 1948 report indicated that only 40% of AF officers were college graduates.<sup>15</sup> As such, the program's intent was to raise the general educational qualifications of regular officers to at least a 2-year college education. In addition, the program provided a basic education to improve the performance of assigned duties and enhance the potential for professional and intellectual advancement.<sup>16</sup> Not only did obtaining a degree afford members promotion opportunities, but they were also warned that failure to do so could lead to early release from the Service.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Easterling, 36-37.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 44-45.

<sup>14</sup> Air Force Letter (AFL) 34-52, *Personnel Services: Program for Raising the Educational Qualifications of Air Force Personnel*. September 23, 1949. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Easterling, 54.

<sup>16</sup> AFL 34-52,1-2.

<sup>17</sup> Easterling, 55-56.

## 1950s: The Korean War

### *Air Force Education Programs*

During the Korean War participation in and support for off-duty education continued to increase. However, the program's *primary* purpose differed from the past. Air Force Letter 34-23 addressed not only the need to train members for combat, but emphasized the need to combat communism. The letter cited research suggesting that education was the best way to combat communist indoctrination efforts on U.S. POWs. As such, it specified that the education program "inculcate the highest ideals of citizenship, faith in our form of government, respect for the dignity of the individual, confidence in the integrity of the U.S., a firm sense of mission, and a willingness and eagerness to serve in support of ideals of freedom."<sup>18</sup>

The program also continued to support AF requirements. In 1953, only 43.6% of officers and 1.6% of enlisted members were college graduates and only 62.8% of enlisted members were high school graduates.<sup>19</sup> The education programs helped fulfill requirements by restricting areas of study that Mil TA reimbursed. Air Force Regulation (AFR) 34-8, specified that subjects studied had to: 1) fulfill requirements for a high school diploma or college degree, or 2) be related to, or designed to improve the efficiency in the warrant officer or airman career fields, or 3) assist the person in the performance of present or anticipated assignment.<sup>20</sup>

Although officials supported off-duty education, budget constraints had some negative effects. For example, the 1952 appropriations act limited Mil TA to enlisted members and

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<sup>18</sup> Air Force Letter (AFL) 34-23, *Personnel Services: Statement of Policy, Information and Education in the Armed Forces*. September 24, 1953.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Air Force Regulation (AFR) 34-8, *Personnel Services: Programming for Education Services Activities*. August 8, 1955, 3.

officers below the rank of Captain.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, AF leaders continued to advocate for the programs and in 1954, Mil TA was restored to all officers; however, they had to accept a 2-year service commitment following course completion.<sup>22</sup>

### ***Veterans Readjustment Act of 1952***

The Veterans Readjustment Act of 1952 provided eligible members up to \$110 a month, from which the member paid for tuition, books, fees, supplies and other training costs. Members were entitled to education and training for a period of one and half times their active service, up to 36 months.<sup>23</sup>

## **1960s**

### ***Air Force Education Programs***

Korean War events ensured AF leaders remained firm in their support for education programs throughout the 1960s. The Mil TA costs more than doubled from 1960 to 1963, and was reflected by a corresponding rise in enrollments. The increase in program costs was in part due to DoD's increase in authorized TA rate. Reimbursement rates went from \$7.50 to \$13.50 per semester hour, not to exceed 75% of the tuition costs. This provided considerable relief to students as many were paying more than 25% out of pocket.<sup>24</sup>

Air Force Regulation 34-8 stated the intent of the education program was to provide personnel with opportunities to meet desired current and long-range educational requirements. This included the goal of a college degree for officers and a high school diploma for enlisted

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<sup>21</sup> Easterling, 66.

<sup>22</sup> Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 1955, Public Law 83-458, § 730, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 68 (1954): 355-356.

<sup>23</sup> "GI Bill Turns 62 Today"

<sup>24</sup> Easterling, 90.

members. The program provided personnel with opportunities that met AF educational requirements in specific areas of study to develop skills essential to support and operate modern AF weapons. The program continued to emphasize opportunities to acquire knowledge and confidence needed to defend the principles of democracy.<sup>25</sup>

### ***Veterans Readjustment Act of 1966***

The Veterans Readjustment Benefits Act of 1966 differed significantly from prior bills. Benefits were provided retroactively to veterans who served during the interval of peace between Korea and Vietnam, as well as to members still on active duty—a crucial step toward the separation of veteran's legislation from a specific war and even from war itself.<sup>26</sup> This concept was enhanced when DoD became an all-volunteer force and legislation was primarily aimed at military recruitment rather than at readjustment help for veterans.<sup>27</sup>

### **1970s: The All-Volunteer Force**

#### ***Air Force Education Programs***

The DoD became an all-volunteer force in 1973. To assist with the new policy implementation, the AF's Fisher and DiSario conducted a study evaluating the attitudes of youth toward military service in a zero draft environment. Their study analyzed the results of a 1972 DoD survey on youths' enlistment motivation and attitudes toward the military. In addition, they interviewed 1,924 males aged 16 to 21 years. The study concluded that male high school students showed a higher enlistment potential than college students and males not in school. A

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<sup>25</sup> Air Force Regulation (AFR) 34-8, *The Education Services Program*. March 24, 1961, 1.

<sup>26</sup> "GI Bill Turns 62 Today"

<sup>27</sup> Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, *The G.I. Bill: A New Deal for Veterans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 210.

fully paid college education provided the greatest incentive, especially for 16 and 17 year olds.<sup>28</sup>

The AF responded by expanding education programs and making applicable changes to policy.

The education program's intent was not only to provide personnel with opportunities for career-long learning to meet the needs of the AF and the Nation, but also to support AF recruiting and retention.<sup>29</sup>

The quality of on-base education programs was questioned in 1977, when Ashworth and Lindley accused on-base schools of operating "diploma mills," caring more about income than quality. They insisted military students were being overcharged for marginal education alleging the programs lacked both content and rigor, using faculty with questionable credentials.<sup>30</sup> The schools and educators responded to these allegations by stating that the authors failed to understand the Service member's unique education needs did not understanding the advances achieved by institutions in non-traditional settings such as military bases.<sup>31</sup>

Despite a force reduction, education programs saw tremendous growth in the 1970s. This growth may well be attributed to the implementation of the all-volunteer force and subsequent establishment of the Community College of the Air Force (in 1972). By 1976, more than 97% of officers held a bachelor degree or higher and the more than 95% of enlisted personnel had completed high school.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Allan H. Fisher Jr. and Martha R. DiSario, *Attitudes of Youth Toward Military Service in a Zero-Draft Environment: Results of a National Survey Conducted in November 1972*, abstract, (Alexandria, VA: Air Force Human Resources Lab, February 1974).

<sup>29</sup> Air Force Regulation (AFR) 213-1, *Educational Services Program*. June 7, 1976, 1-1.

<sup>30</sup> Easterling, 158-159.

<sup>31</sup> Kenneth E. Young et al., "Military Base Programs," *Change* 9, no. 4 (April, 1977): 4.

<sup>32</sup> Easterling, 146-147.

### ***Veterans' Education Assistance Program***

Congress provided a new veteran's program for personnel entering DoD after December 31, 1976. The Veterans' Education Assistance Program (VEAP) allowed eligible members to contribute toward their future education by allotting a portion of their pay into an education account. The government matched this contribution on a 2:1 basis. The maximum allowable contribution was \$2,700 with the government match of \$5,400.<sup>33</sup> The VEAP's primary purpose was to attract recruits to an all-volunteer DoD rather than help veterans adjust to civilian life. As such, the bill's provisions were far less generous and therefore less successful than the original GI Bill.

### **1980s through Present Day**

#### ***Air Force Education Programs***

The AF education programs have continued to grow since the 1980s. Despite the almost 50% decrease in end strength since 1985, Mil TA expenditures have more than doubled, going from \$34.4 million (\$70.5 million in 2010 dollars) to \$184.6 million in 2010. In the same timeframe, Airmen degree completion numbers more than doubled.<sup>34</sup>

The DoD (and AF) education program gets its authority from Section 2007 of Title 10, USC. Public Law 98-525, Defense Authorization Act (1984), allowed the Services to pay up to 75% of tuition and expenses incurred for off-duty education. The law made three exceptions: 1) not more than 90% of the charges could be paid for enlisted members, E-5 or higher, with less than 14 years service; 2) all charges could be paid for members enrolled in a high school completion program; and 3) no charges could be paid for officers, unless the officer agreed to a

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<sup>33</sup>“GI Bill Turns 62 Today”

<sup>34</sup> Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES), “DoD Voluntary Education Fact Sheet, Archive,” <http://www.dantes.doded.mil> (accessed February 9, 2011).

2-year service commitment after completing the education.<sup>35</sup> In 2000 a major change in law occurred. Public Law 106-368 authorized the Services to pay ‘all or a portion of the charges’ of tuition and expenses incurred for off-duty education, nearly doubling the AF Mil TA costs.<sup>36,37</sup>

Department of Defense Instruction, 1322.25 guides the Voluntary Education Program and directs the Services to provide academic, technical, intellectual, personal, and professional development opportunities to Service members to contribute to both the Service’s readiness as well as the Service member’s quality of life. The education program should increase the Service members’ opportunities for advancement by enhancing their academic skills and occupational competencies.<sup>38</sup> Current DoD policy sets uniform Mil TA reimbursement levels that are mandated across the Services. The Services may reimburse 100% of the cost for high school completion programs, while undergraduate and graduate course caps are \$250.00 per semester-hour credit for tuition and fees (fiscal year ceiling is \$4,500). The DoD periodically reviews the uniform Mil TA rates to consider inflation and other effects.<sup>39</sup> As a quality control measure, TA is only provided for courses offered by postsecondary institutions accredited by a Department of Education (DoE) recognized national or regional accrediting body.<sup>40</sup>

According to AFI 36-2306, the purpose of the AFVEP is to support Force Development by maintaining an educated force. The program contributes to occupational and institutional competencies, special needs, and readiness. Furthermore, it supports AF recruiting and retention

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<sup>35</sup> Department of Defense Authorization Act, 1985, Public Law 98-525, 98 Stat. 2618 (1984).

<sup>36</sup> National Defense Authorization, Fiscal Year 2001, Public Law 106-398, 114 Stat. 1654A (2000)

<sup>37</sup> Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES), “DoD Voluntary Education Fact Sheet, Archive,” [www.dantes.doded.mil](http://www.dantes.doded.mil) (accessed February 9, 2011).

<sup>38</sup> Department of Defense Instruction 1322.25, *Voluntary Education Programs*, March 15, 2011, 12

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 12.

efforts. The program meets these needs by providing opportunities to enhance an Airman's professional and personal development.<sup>41</sup> The AF follows DoD guidance regarding the uniform tuition assistance policy caps and ceilings.

### ***Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB)***

The MGIB aimed to support an all-voluntary force, leveraging the popularity of earlier GI Bills. This bill extended benefits to military reservists. Eligible participants contributed \$100 a month for the first twelve months of service. Education benefits included \$400 a month for 36 months.<sup>42</sup> Unfortunately, the MGIB's benefits, like many of the bills since the original 1947 bill, reflected a steady decline of benefit while college tuition costs grew. It was a recruitment incentive, not a wartime benefit.<sup>43</sup>

### ***Post 9/11 GI Bill***

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq along with the growing need for postsecondary education to remain economically competitive has driven continued congressional support for educational benefits. The Post 9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 provides eligible members up to 36 months of benefits at an average of \$458 per credit hour. For the first time ever, the GI Bill also allows for the transfer of benefits to dependents, recognizing that the demands of military life may impact the family member's ability to obtain higher education.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> AFI 36-2306, 5.

<sup>42</sup> "GI Bill Turns 62 Today"

<sup>43</sup> Dan Ephron, "A Learning Disability: Little is Being Done to Give Vets the Educational Opportunities their Elders Enjoyed," *Newsweek*, November 26, 2007, 40.

<sup>44</sup> Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, *Benefitting Whom? For-Profit Education Companies and Growth of Military Education Benefits*, 111th Cong., 2010, 3.

## Recruiting and Retention

At the end of FY11, the AF met its recruiting goal for the 12th consecutive year.<sup>45,46,47</sup>

In addition, the AF is experiencing a 16-year high in enlisted retention, necessitating the need for reductions in accessions and additional force management actions. Without these actions in FY10, the overall retention would have exceeded goals by more than 4%. The AF expects to experience similar retention rates through FY12 and into FY13.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to development, AF leadership values Mil TA as a recruiting and retention tool. However, when recruiting and retention are of little concern, in a fiscally constrained environment, the question becomes how valuable is it? As discussed above, studies conducted prior to an all-volunteer force confirmed a correlation between education benefits offered and those most likely to enlist. However, since then studies attempting to tie recruiting and retention to Mil TA usage indicate the correlation may not be as strong as once believed.

Most information regarding the effects of Mil TA on recruiting comes from qualitative surveys versus quantitative studies. The FY10 Basic Military Training Survey of approximately 1,700 recruits asked recruits to rank the importance of benefits and entitlements (e.g. educational programs, job/skill training, pay, quarters/quarters allowance, medical and dental care, travel opportunities, annual leave, and retirement system). Education programs ranked first in FY07

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<sup>45</sup> USAF, “Air Force Meets Recruiting Goals for Tenth Year in a Row,” <http://www.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123172437> (accessed October 23, 2011).

<sup>46</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, “DoD Announces Recruiting and Retention Numbers for Fiscal 2011,” <http://www.defense.gov/Releases/Release.aspx?ReleaseID=14871> (accessed October 23, 2011).

<sup>47</sup> Military.com News, “Services Exceed 2010 Recruiting Goals,” <http://www.military.com/news/article/services-exceed-2010-recruiting-goals.html> (accessed October 23, 11).

<sup>48</sup> Senate Armed Services Committee, *Active, Guard, Reserve, and Civilian Personnel Programs in Review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2012 and the Future Years Defense Program*, 112th Cong., 2011, 2-3.

and FY09, but fell to second place after dental care in FY10.<sup>49</sup> As part of a study looking at enlisted retention and Mil TA, Buddin and Kapur made periphery comments regarding recruiting benefits. They indicated that only 62% of recruits claimed education benefits and opportunities were a primary reason for joining the military (1999 Active-Duty Survey).<sup>50</sup>

In 1998, Brauchle studied the relationship between off-duty education participation and enlisted retention using the results of a 1992 DoD survey of 32,000 active duty members. In addition, Brauchle utilized data obtained interviewing 31 Army and AF members. Brauchle found long-term participation in education was related to intention to re-enlist; however, when other factors were considered, the overall effect on participation was small. He found that the military placed a high value on education in formal policies, promotions, and attitudes suggesting that the military had adopted education participation as a cultural element. Because the culture of education was so embedded in the environment, the effect of educational participation on re-enlistment may be masked by other variables, such as satisfaction with military life.<sup>51</sup>

Buddin and Kapur conducted the most recent study regarding off-duty education and retention in 2002. The study's results conflicted with a previous study conducted by Boesel and Johnson, which found a strong positive relationship between retention and participation in off-duty education. Boesel and Johnson's study merged military records on TA usage with personnel data collected in a 1985 DoD Survey. Their model suggested that the retention rate for

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<sup>49</sup> Community College of the Air Force, *Community College of the Air Force 2010 Annual Report* (Maxwell-Gunter AFB, 2010), 15.

<sup>50</sup> Richard Buddin and Kanika Kapur, *Tuition Assistance Usage and First-Term Military Retention*. (Santa Monica, CA, RAND, 2002), 51.

<sup>51</sup> Kenneth C. Brauchle, "United States Armed Forces' Voluntary Education Program: The Effect on Enlisted Servicemember Retention" (paper presented at annual meeting of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education, Phoenix, AZ, November 21, 1998), ii.

TA users was about 12% higher than for nonusers. Buddin and Kapur assert that while Boesel and Johnson's study was comprehensive it had weaknesses, as they did not control for the length of time that "stayers" and "leavers" were eligible for TA. To overcome these weaknesses Buddin and Kapur reestimated Boesel and Johnson's models. They concluded that TA usage did not increase the probability of Sailors or Marines reenlisting at the end of their first term. In fact, study results indicated Marine and Navy TA users had lower retention rates (4.4% and 8.9% respectively) than comparable nonusers. Buddin and Kapur attributed two factors to account for the conflicting results. First, the GI Bill provided benefits to cover college expenses after service. Second, a member's deployments and duty conflicts made it problematic for them to pursue a degree. Members anxious to earn a degree may have seen little reason to pursue their studies as a full-time Marine or Sailor. Rather, they could leave the military and attend school using GI Bill benefits.<sup>52</sup>

## Discussion

The Army Reorganization Bill of 1866 laid the foundation for nonmilitary education and set the stage for future program intent and policy. The program's original purpose was to instill patriotism, provide cultural opportunities, and reduce crime. Since its inception, the program's requirements have expanded and contracted in response to the environment. By WWI, the education program's focus was on Army personnel requirements—the need for better-educated personnel. Although military requirements changed over time, the program's focus remained on requirements. However, with the all-volunteer force, the focus changed to recruitment and retention efforts. Albeit, requirements were still a factor discussed in policy, it became

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<sup>52</sup> Buddin and Kapur, 8 and 50-51.

secondary to recruitment and retention. In fact, current AF guidance continues to stress the importance of meeting long-range AF requirements and developing Airmen personally and professionally. However, there is nothing in policy that actually ensures AF requirements are being supported by the program. As with the AFVEP, the GI Bill's purpose also changed over time. The initial WWI program was dedicated to veteran's readjustment assistance. The implementation of the all-volunteer force transitioned the intent of the bill to more of a recruitment tool.

The Mil TA budget has grown exponentially, especially since the 2000 legislation authorized 100% reimbursement, almost doubling AF Mil TA costs. In addition, the Post 9/11 GI Bill provides a significant boost to benefits compared to previous bills, with the added ability for Service members to transfer benefits to dependents. Although too early to assess, this policy may boost Mil TA usage as Airmen choose to transfer their benefits. In summary, benefits for Mil TA and the GI Bill are now duplicative efforts to support recruiting and retention goals. In addition, both program's monetary benefits have grown exponentially.

The concern regarding education quality is not new. The changes in education delivery modes, such as the on-base extension campuses in the 1970s and the present distance learning raise concerns on comparability with on-campus programs. However, as demonstrated by the hugely successful on-base campuses, much of the 1970's concern was unfounded. The success of distance learning remains to be seen as the distance learning modes continue to improve. However, given the fact that even prestigious universities are now utilizing distance learning, there is evidence that if done correctly, distance learning can provide a quality education. That said, concerns regarding for-profit schools might be warranted based on recent GAO findings

regarding substandard practices.<sup>53</sup> The DoD policy ensures quality by mandating that academic institutions be nationally or regionally accredited in order to be authorized Mil TA.

Accreditation should be guarantee enough that Service members are receiving a quality education. In addition, on going efforts between DoD and the DoE will ensure continued oversight of these concerns.

Air Force officials justify high Mil TA costs in part, by touting the program as important recruiting and retention tools. Studies conducted prior to and just after the implementation of the all-volunteer force supported a strong correlation between education benefits and the likelihood of young males to enlist in the AF, thereby supporting additional costs associated with the Mil TA program. However, other than initial entry subjective studies, there appears to be no quantitative studies correlating recruitment goals with Mil TA. Since the AF has met recruiting goals for the last 12 years, the necessity of Mil TA as a recruiting tool may not be what it once was. This is not to say that the program should not continue to assist in recruiting efforts, but that officials should be wary as to the extent they justify the program as a recruitment tool.

Studies regarding Mil TA and its effect on enlisted member retention have been variable. Early studies found a correlation between education and retention; however, later studies found flaws in the methodology used in these studies and that the correlation may not be as strong as once thought. For example, the RAND study found that Navy and Marine retention was lower for those that utilized Mil TA. They suggested members were using their GI Bill and/or that deployments may have impacted their ability to pursue their academic goals. This may have been true in 2002; however, Service members today are pursuing degrees all over the world

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<sup>53</sup> Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, *For-Profit Colleges: Undercover Testing Finds Colleges Encourage Fraud and Engaged in Deceptive Questionable Marketing Practices*. 111th Cong., 2010, 1.

without any significant issues. In addition, as indicated above, the post 9/11 GI Bill's transferability may now increase the utilization rates in Mil TA. In summary, there is not a significant correlation between Mil TA and retention. As with recruiting, officials should be careful about placing too much emphasis on retention when justifying Mil TA costs.

## **Conclusion**

Congressional interest, budget concerns, quality, and program purpose have all posed challenges for AF leaders. In response, the AF Mil TA purpose and policy has adjusted accordingly. In doing so, the program has reflected the wartime, economic, and U.S. cultural environments. Congressional interest combined with the current environment of prolonged conflict and economic crisis again requires a re-evaluation and subsequent update to AF Mil TA policy. This paper provided a historical examination of AF Mil TA intent and policy. In summary, Mil TA has always been tied to requirements; however, this emphasis has decreased over time with recruiting, retention, and Airmen freedom of choice becoming prominent. In addition, program costs have risen exponentially, not only with increasing tuition rates, but also with the 2000 legislation authorizing 100% reimbursement. Lastly, the GI Bill has also focused on recruiting and retention, thereby providing duplicate efforts between the Services and the Veterans Administration (see Appendix 1 for a historical comparison of military education and GI Bill programs). Based on the historical examination, the following recommendations suggest the AF return to a more requirements driven Mil TA program.

## Recommendations

In accordance with current policy, refocusing the AFVEP on requirements would benefit Airmen both professionally and personally, while simultaneously supporting AF Force Development requirements. While the DoD uniform Mil TA policy mandates specific reimbursement rates there is nothing in current DoD or AF policy that would prevent the AF from restricting the types of degrees Airmen might pursue using Mil TA or from incentivizing degrees the AF requires.

One option is to formally map degrees (or categories of degrees) to AF Institutional Competencies (IC). This would ensure Airmen get relevant degrees that develop them both personally and professionally while simultaneously helping to meet AF requirements. Mapping degrees to ICs would also assure a level of quality (degree type) that would prepare Airmen for transition to the civilian sector. Mapping degrees to Air Force Specialty Codes may be too restrictive. While it would assist in developing the Airmen professionally, it would take away the personal options for Airmen and change the overall intent of the AFVEP. In addition, there is no AF requirement for Airmen to have a bachelors degree, thereby making it difficult to justify. Lastly, The AFVEP must not turn into a program that only aims to fulfill AF education requirements; rather, the program should augment Force Development requirements on a voluntary basis.

Current policy also states that Mil TA may be used for special interest areas. For example, members are allowed to utilize Mil TA for language classes even if they are not part of a degree program. This policy exception could also be utilized to incentivize Airmen pursuing AF special interest areas such as science, technology, engineering, and math. The second order effects of this option would have to be thoroughly vetted by the A1 community. The A1

community may want to place certain restrictions on officers pursuing these degrees. For example, allowing only those with less than eight years commissioned service to obtain these degrees, with the additional caveat that they would agree to cross-train should AF requirements dictate. This would ensure the AF could utilize the degree inventory effectively. For enlisted Airmen, there should be deliberate efforts to tie such programs directly to commissioning similar to the Airmen Education and Commissioning Program (AECP). Unlike AECP, this program would provide additional flexibility to the Airmen allowing them to complete their degree while remaining at their current duty station. The program would neither obligate the member nor guarantee commissioning upon completion; however, it would create an inventory of degrees and personnel to utilize in addition to other formal commissioning programs should the AF need them.

A requirement-based AFVEP would decrease the need to justify the program as recruiting and retention tools. The AFVEP should continue to support recruiting and retention efforts, but not depend on them as a primary justification for funding, especially with the lack of significant empirical evidence supporting the relationship between the two. If degrees were mapped to ICs, it would ensure the education was of institutional value to the AF, even if the member was not a degree related to their career field or to fulfill specific manning document requirements.

Lastly, although beyond the AF's purview and scope of this paper, it is recommended that legislation and DoD return to a 75% maximum Mil TA reimbursement rate. And, that DoD continues to monitor and adjust semester hour caps and annual ceilings. Returning to a 75% reimbursement rate would not only save money, but would ensure Service members become

better consumers of education, by prompting them to evaluate both the quality and cost of their education.

In closing, Mil TA is of tremendous value to the AF, but as with all programs, must be periodically re-examined. This paper provided recommendations based on the historical links between policy and environmental context. Although the AF values education and Mil TA is a great recruiting and retention tool, perhaps the Mil TA program could still meet those unsubstantiated goals, but also meet more AF requirements goals. The suggestions for reducing reimbursement to 75% and tying degrees to AF ICs are steps in helping control costs and ensuring quality education for Airmen all while meeting more AF requirements.

## Appendix

**Table 1: History of Non-military Education and GI Bill Intent**

Era	Related Law	Intent	
		Mil TA	GI Bill
1838-WWII	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Army Reorganization Bill of 1866</li> <li>• Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944</li> </ul>	<p>1866: instill patriotism, provide cultural opportunities, and reduce crime rates by eliminating idleness</p> <p>WWI: meet requirement for more intelligent and better educated enlisted personnel in more technologically advanced Army</p> <p>WWII: better qualify personnel for military duty, prepare members for increased responsibilities, improve morale, and prepare personnel for transition to civilian life</p>	<p>Prevent unemployment problems, diminish unrest and dissatisfaction among veterans, and reestablish human resources stunted by the war</p> <p>Veterans had to have served 90 days or more after September 16, 1940, and have other than a dishonorable discharge. They were entitled to one year of full-time training plus a period equal to their time in service, up to a maximum of 48 months. Benefits included \$500 a year for tuition, books, fees, and other training costs</p>
1945-1949: A Separate AF	National Security Act of 1947	Raise general educational qualifications of officers to at least a 2-year college educational	
1950s: The Korean War	Veterans Readjustment Act of 1952	Support AF education requirements and combat communism by inculcating values, which would make Airmen better American citizens	<p>Intent was the same Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944</p> <p>Covered up to \$110 a month, out of which the member had to pay for tuition, books, fees, supplies</p>

			and other training costs. Members were entitled to education and training for a period one and have times their active service up to 36 months
1960s	Veterans Readjustment Act of 1966	<p>Provide personnel with opportunities to meet the desired AF current and long-range educational requirements</p> <p>Continued to emphasize opportunities to acquire knowledge, insight, vision, and self-confidence needed to defend the principles of democracy</p>	<p>Benefits were extended retroactively to veterans who had served during the interval of peace between Korea and Vietnam, as well as to Service members still on Active Duty</p> <p>The education and training benefit provided was one month for each month of service for a maximum of 45 months</p>
1970s: All Volunteer Force		<p>Provide personnel with opportunities for career-long learning and the means to develop the background essential to meeting the immediate and long-range needs of the AF and of the Nation.</p> <p>Maintain a public image supporting the attractiveness of AF in personnel procurement and retention, ranging from initial tours of service through full careers</p>	<p>The intent of VEAP was to place more emphasis on attracting recruits for the armed services after the military draft ended than on helping veterans adjust to civilian life</p> <p>Allowed members to contribute toward their future education program by allotting a portion of their monthly pay into an education account. The government matched this contribution on a 2:1 basis. The maximum allowable contribution was \$2,700 with the government match of \$5,400. Members were eligible if they were discharged under condition</p>

			other than dishonorable and received monthly payments for the number of months contributed, or 36 months, whichever was less
1980s – Present	<p>Montgomery GI Bill</p> <p>The Post 9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act</p> <p>National Defense Authorization, FY01, P.L. 106-398</p>	<p>Support AF Force Development by maintaining an educated force</p> <p>Contribute to occupational and institutional competencies, special needs, and readiness</p> <p>Support recruiting and retention benefits</p> <p>Services authorized to pay all or a portion of the charges of tuition and expenses incurred for off-duty education</p>	<p>MGIB: designed as a recruitment incentive not a wartime benefit</p> <p>Participants allotted \$100 a month for the first 12 months of service. To benefit, the members must have served for three or more years and received an honorable discharge. Education benefits include \$400 a month for 36 months.</p> <p>Post 9/11 GI Bill: Guarantees almost all service members, including reserve troops who serve a minimum of 90 days active duty after September 10, 2001, educational benefits up to 36 months at an average of \$458 per credit hour. For the first time ever, the GI Bill provides the ability to transfer or share the educational benefit with spouses and children.</p>

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